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S E C R E T VATICAN 002292

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/WE (MENUTTI)

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SUBJECT: ISRAELI EMBASSY READOUT OF MAY 10
PEREZ/TAURAN/SODANO MEETING

CLASSIFIED BY: AMBASSADOR JIM NICHOLSON FOR REASONS 1.5 (A) AND (D).

1. (S) ZWI TAL(PROTECT), DCM OF THE ISRAELI EMBASSY TO THE HOLY SEE, GAVE DCM HIS EMBASSY'S PERSPECTIVE OF THE MAY 10 MEETING AMONG ISRAELI FOREIGN MINISTER PERES, VATICAN FOREIGN MINISTER-EQUIVALENT TAURAN, AND VATICAN PRIME MINISTER-EQUIVALENT SODANO. TAL'S VIEWS ARE BASED ON A READ-OUT OF THE MEETING HE RECEIVED FROM HIS AMBASSADOR, YOSEF LAMDAN, WHO ATTENDED THE MEETING.

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2. (S) ACCORDING TO TAL, MEETING WAS MORE OF A BRIEFING ON THE PART OF PERES, THAN AN ACTUAL EXCHANGE OF VIEWS. THE ONE ISSUE OF ACTUAL DISCUSSION WAS THE ROLE OF ARAFAT AS A PARTNER IN THE PEACE NEGOTIATIONS. PERES SAID THAT ARAFAT STILL HAD TO PROVE HE IS A SERIOUS PARTNER AND COULD CONTROL THE VIOLENCE; PERES SAID THAT THE GOI WAS WILLING TO GIVE HIM A CHANCE. SODANO INSISTED, HOWEVER, THAT ARAFAT IS THE LEGITIMATE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE, AND AS SUCH MUST BE THE INDIVIDUAL WITH WHOM THE ISRAELIS ENGAGE.

3.(S) THE ISRAELI SIDE WAS MOST SURPRISED THAT THE VATICAN RAISED THE SITUATION IN BETHLEHEM ONLY IN PASSING. TAL REPORTED THAT SODANO "EXPRESSED SATISFACTION" THAT THE SITUATION HAS BEEN RESOLVED, BUT "TRUE TO FORM" OFFERED NO WORDS OF THANKS TO THE ISRAELIS. SODANO "REHASHED" THE VATICAN POSITION ON "TWO PEOPLES/TWO STATES", AS WELL AS THE NEED FOR DISCUSSIONS ON JERUSALEM. TAL SAID, "TO BE FAIR" NEITHER SODANO NOR TAURAN EXPRESSED SERIOUS ANNOYANCE WITH THE ISRAELI MILITARY ACTION, AND ALLOWED PERES TO EXPLAIN HOW THE ACTION HAS SUCCEEDED IN DISMANTLING MUCH OF THE TERRORIST INFRASTRUCTURE.

4.(S) TAL SAID THAT IN THE RIDE BACK FROM THE MEETING, PERES TOLD LAMDAN THAT ISRAELI/VATICAN RELATIONS ARE "NOT AS BAD" AS EVERYONE BELIEVES.

5.(S) POST WILL REPORT ON VATICAN'S PERCEPTION OF MEETING SEPTTEL. NICHOLSON

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